

Dear Honored State Reps.

My interest in Veterans Court.

7 Months ago, started the worst period of my life, when my son had a PTSD episode.

Realizing he was having issues, he left his residence, traveled to his grandparents, where he contacted the Army, for assistance with transport to a treatment facility. During the transport, en-route to his residence, to drop off his car, get clothes, .. not really sure what the reason, as the Army has been silent on the matter, the soldiers transporting my son decided to stop to allow him to purchase cigarettes and alcohol, and at that point handed my son his car keys, telling him he was on his own. At that point my son returned to his home, told his family to leave the residence, and a subsequent standoff with police ensued. During the stand-off, my son exited the residence, went to an adjacent wooded lot, and discharged his weapon into a tree. Upon return to his residence, my son was tazered, and taken to a hospital, and charged the next morning with 5 counts of attempted murder, and 4 counts of discharging a firearm.

Upon his incarceration the next morning, he was placed in an observation cell for several months, his VA prescribed medication for his PTSD was withheld, he was not allowed to turn lights off during much of that period, nor was he even allowed the dignity of shaving until the day prior to his Psych Evaluation, which was again 1-2 months after his incarceration, and was only allowed out of the small isolation/observation cell for approximately 1 hour per day. It was a full 7 months before my son got a hearing in Veterans Court, and was sent for the treatment he needed, in fact the treatment he was destined for on the evening of August 9th when this tragedy occurred.

Lets step back now, and take a look at the soldier in question.

After 9/11, my son enlisted in the Army, serving 2 tours of Iraq, part of that time being spent as a Scout, performing door to door searches, and returning from his 2nd tour to find that his wife had spent all of his earnings, and left him financially destitute, before seeking a divorce circa 2007/2008

In 2009, my son re-married, and was looking forward to his new married life, helping to raise children that he never had the opportunity to have with his 1st marriage, even if not children by birth, and an eventual departure from the military, and the joy of maintaining a house of his own.

In mid 2010, my son called me late one evening, and it was clear that he was in need of help, we sought to get him treatment, and thankfully, were able to do so.

Following my sons incarceration, the Army ceased paying my son's pay, and left his family unable to maintain their household on a single income. If not for the assistance of the Mason VFW, there is no question that neither his mortgage, nor his attorney would have been paid, and his life would have been further ruined.

I would like to know, Why does this country treat Veterans in this fashion? Veterans Court needs to step in sooner, the cost of this ordeal on his family, both by marriage and by birth has been extensive, emotionally and financially, now well into 5 figures.

Thank you,

Joy Kerr

The Mother of a (2) soldier(s).

Additional thoughts from the Step-father of a soldier.

As someone who has been involved with the soldier noted above for the better part of a decade (I met his mother in late 2006, while he was still serving his 2nd tour of Iraq, and know how his mother had many sleepless nights, worrying about his safety, the joy she had when she got word he was returning to the US, and even the concerns as he pondered returning to Iraq, noting the financial straights he was in following his divorce.

When my step-son returned to the Lansing area, and took a position at the local recruiting office, I finally had a chance to spend some significant time with him, and to understand what an honorable and fine man my wife had raised, and what a role-model he was for his siblings, including his youngest brother, who followed him into the Army in 2008, and is now serving in Afghanistan.

Around May or June of 2010, I had the unfortunate, or fortunate luck to be woken at about 2:30 in the morning, as a call came in on our phone, hearing my step-son on the line, and clearly very distressed and drunk (one sign of PTSD is self-medication with alcohol), and listened for over an hour as I could hear a very sorrowful man on the other end of the line, crying, and describing to his mother some of the horrors of war he personally experienced, and in many cases death that occurred as a direct result of his service to his country. To be honest, my biggest fear was that those words would very likely be the last words we would hear from her son, in fact after more than an hour, I had to leave the room because I just did not care to hear that gunshot that I expected would end the phone-call.

The following morning I made urgent contacts with several friends, some who I knew had contacts high in the Military, some who I knew had advanced knowledge of Military medical protocol, and several members of the Michigan Legislature, who I knew were friends and supporters of Military Veterans, and after a day of two of discussions, felt certain that I could urge my step-son into treatment, confident that seeking treatment would not jeopardize any future in the military, as he was still considering signing for a 3rd enlistment in the Army at that point.

During the ensuing Treatment, my step-son was sent to Ann Arbor, Toledo, and eventually to Fort Knox Kentucky for PTSD treatment, and during that period he came to realize that the extent of his PTSD was such that continued military service was not beneficial, and he was seeking a medical discharge at the time of the PTSD episode that led to his incarceration.

While I certainly don't want to condone the discharge of a firearm within city limits, nor the discharge of any weapon outside of controlled and appropriate environments, It is clear that the facts of this case cried out for the application of the Veterans Court from day one if any case did, and in this case, I feel that Ingham County, who had recently formed such a court, failed this soldier miserably by dragging out for over 7 months, and reportedly around \$20,000, along with totally reprehensible treatment of the soldier, treatment that I might argue wouldn't even be permitted by the Geneva convention.

It is my hope that through this case, the people of this State can learn not only the value of the Veterans Court, but the need to follow the chartered purpose (at least by the Ingham County charter), that the soldier be promptly placed into the Veterans Court, and the process of seeking appropriate treatment be just as timely.

As an additional after-thought, I would like to bring this committees attention to the NASA Aviation Safety Reporting System (ASRS), and how it allows individuals to report accidental/incidental situations which adversely effect the aviation community, in hopes that the community will be improved, with the knowledge that their voluntary report cannot be used against them (excepting gross negligence).

It is my belief that such a concept should be looked at for military personnel, allowing them to seek treatment, with the knowledge that such treatment can be kept confidential, and cannot be used against them in their military service, just as the ASRS system prevent voluntary reports from being used against the self-reporter.

I would also like to make a note of individuals like Gunnery Sgt Thomas, who is seeking to create a private, Veterans only, facility where veterans, active and retired, can pull themselves out of the public environment, and seek to deal with their military service issues, without government involvement, essentially a "PTSD anonymous" type of group, with the ability to stay for extended periods if the veteran feels the need, as opposed to choosing to walk away from society and choosing the life on the streets. I would hope that this body could seek to see that the State seeks to maximize the ability of such programs to form, and if viable, become self sufficient.

Thank you for your Time and Consideration.

Robert Kerr

(Step)Father of two soldiers